The Cleveland Museum of Art

Press Release

March 13, 1995 Contact: Greg Donley

Shelby Lee Adams Photographs: Appalachian Portraits
On view April 7–June 4, 1995
Artist lecture: April 26, 6:00 pm

Twenty black-and-white photographs by Shelby Lee Adams are featured in **Appalachian Portraits,** a new exhibition opening Friday, April 7, at the Cleveland Museum of Art. The prints were selected from a remarkable body of work created during Adams' annual summer visits to his eastern Kentucky native region over the past two decades. The following excerpt of an article written for the museum's *Members Magazine* by Tom Hinson, curator of contemporary art, describes Adams' working process.

> Isolated from mainstream America, Adams's subjects have inherited a complex legacy of religious and cultural values. Deeply suspicious of outsiders, they are ferociously protective of their privacy. Adams grew up in the region and has an uncle there who is a well-known and respected country doctor, factors that gained him admission into their hidden world. Now his sitters provide introductions to neighbors and friends. Taking his time getting to know his subjects, Adams works with an individual or a family over a long period in order to establish the level of trust necessary to create his straightforward and penetrating portraits. Using a large-format camera, he has recorded a broad range of emotions from anger and sorrow to love and happiness. Frequently confrontational and disturbing, his stark and candid photographs grab our attention but often require numerous readings before their complexity becomes apparent. He wants to challenge his audience as well as communicate the kinship he feels for these mountain people. Adams is not interested in a sentimental or sensational rendering of the Appalachian lifestyle but wants "to visually preserve a culture that is disappearing."
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> While an undergraduate art student at the Cleveland Institute of Art from 1969 to 1974, Adams began his long commitment to photography. Subsequently, he received graduate degrees in photography from the University of Iowa in Iowa City and the Massachusetts College of Art in Boston. His work has been exhibited widely and collected, and his first book, *Appalachian Portraits,* was published in 1993. Now living in Pittsfield, Massachusetts, Adams has taught at several universities and currently works as a freelance photographer.

On Wednesday, April 26, at 6:00 pm, Shelby Lee Adams will be at the museum to present *My Appalachia,* a free slide lecture about his work. The talk is sponsored by the Friends of Photography, a museum support group. All museum galleries are open until 9:45 every Wednesday evening, as is the Museum Store; the Cafe is open until 8:30. *Appalachian Portraits* was organized by Tom Hinson.

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